The Charles Viewer

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The Charles Viewer

Poetry, Prose and Art
from the Students of Fisher College, 2002

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The 2002 edition of *The Charles Viewer* contains art and literature created by students of Fisher College. In assembling this work, we sought to present a variety of artistic themes and styles. Though much of this work relates to issues present in the lives of the writers, much of it speaks to an expansive and diverse audience.

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Flower

Dancing

It's raining out

The kind of grainy black and white rain
That turns the whole world into a kind of
Old movie
And I'm this guy stuck out
With this need to dance
In the street
But not that crazy tap crap
Runnin' 'round like I haven't a care
And the world's perfect
But more like a nice slow waltz
Alone in the street
In the rain
And I'm whole
And I'm happy
And maybe the world doesn't have to be perfect

My Wrist is a House

The moon soaps my neck:
a syllable lights the sky.
My feet press letters in the earth.
See there what my heel lifts to reveal:
a word.
My wrist is a house,
host to rhythm whose thumbs
are blood.
My limbs speak
susurrant languages of space
when they bend or rest, when they reach
to hush a stuttering strand, flush
at touch.
My brain strings words like Ruth
at her basket. The reeds she takes sway
in the breeze that drives waves to break at my shore.
My soul holds a speckled forest of scarlet tanagers plucking seed.
On a velvet carpet of moss and loam I linger,
a silhouette against yellow light of yesterday
holding a fresh inky page.
When today's words strum the unknown
if in a line,
a bell,
rising, comes the rustle
of scarlet wings on paper,
wings and air and flame
bleeding past bone
wings beating beyond my fingers,
crimson flashing in my palms
like fire in my hands.

Finding Myself

I was one of those invisible kids who didn't really have a presence when I was growing up in Korea. Being the firstborn son (considered to carry on the "pride" of the family in many Korean families), I was treated like a king at home, but outside, I would be invisible. At home my parents, grandparents and cousins would pamper me. I could have almost anything I wished to have, but outside I was nobody special. I would be an extrovert inside my little castle, but an introvert once I went past the walls that made me king. Past the walls of my kingdom I was a mere peasant, not worthy of another glance. Very shy, with a very low self-confidence, I was scared to speak up for myself, too self-conscious of making a mistake, fearing persecution from my peers.

As I rummage through my mind to look back on childhood, it suddenly occurs to me that I don't have much recollection of it. It's as if I've blocked a part of my memory, hiding behind the ones that I "want" to recall. I don't even remember the friends I had before I left for Australia. I have a photo of what looks like me standing in the school playground dressed in a school sports uniform--white shirt with smears of brown dirt and light blue shorts--holding a traditional Korean handheld drum, which looks like a small beige frying pan. Kids around me dressed in the same way, standing in rows and columns. I guess they were my friends. I guess! Their sunburnt faces are familiar, but I don't know their names. This realization that I could not remember my early years made me feel eerie. The sense of recognizing your own face in a photo and yet feeling detached from it, as if it wasn't you.

On the contrary, images of me playing soccer after I moved to Australia at the age of ten are still vivid and crystal clear, as if it was yesterday. The tingling sensation in my stomach in anticipation of the start of a match. Soft and yet firm feeling of rich green blades of grass under my studded boots. Adrenalin jetting through the veins as the umpire sent out a shriek from his high-pitched whistle to signal the start of the battle. Feet clashing. Hearts pumping. Sweat trickling down the sides of the faces; lungs inhaling heavy, much-needed oxygen. And then, victory, glorious victory. It is always exhilarating to defeat your enemy, to be the victor. Through playing sports I was able to interact with people more naturally. There was less tension and I grew comfortable with making new friends. All the running drove out the introvert and the shyness in me.

Spending my adolescence in a western culture has had a very profound effect on me. It was a very different culture where everyone was an individual and was

respected as one. In Korea, people show respect to their elders, whereas in Australia there is a stronger sense of mutual respect, regardless of age. In Korea, when greeting an older person, perhaps a teacher, you would bow your head in a sign of respect. Teachers or older people in general are at such a distance that you would not call them (anyone over your age) a "friend" or vice a versa. The concept of friendship in Korea only allows people of the same age (almost always) to be friends. Even the use or choice of words change in the Korean language according to the age of the person you're talking to. For example when you say "hello?" to someone your age or younger, you would say "An Nyung?" but to an older person, you would have to say "An Nyung Ha Se Yo?" and bow at the same time.

You could imagine the refreshing surprise I had when I went to Australia and found out that I could be friends with teachers. Of course, they were teachers in class and needed to be respected as such, but we could be on an equal level outside of the classroom. When you compare the language, English does not separate words to be used to a person according to their respective age. "Hello" is "hello," whether the person you're talking to is nine or ninety.

Eastern culture has taught me the respect for elders, while Western culture opened me up to accept equality and respect for others in a different way. I was able to widen my range of views by not disregarding others because they're younger, less educated or just simply different.

I don't pretend to know everything there is to know about life, but it is amazing to find myself thinking that so many people perceive the world only by what they've seen, how narrow minded one could be and not realize it. I was one of those people, and I would still be if I didn't get the opportunities that I did. I consider myself as a hybrid, a mutt, even, as far as my way of thinking goes. It's a combination of eastern ethics and western liberties. I am a conservative and a liberal at the same time. I am grateful for this gift I have been given. It gives me so many more chances to integrate with different kinds of people without experiencing too much conflict. To experience two cultures as I have is one of the most fulfilling and yet challenging experiences one could gain. I have learned that everyone's views can be very different depending on their background. Acknowledging the fact that we are all different is the first step in understanding others. In doing so, I've come closer to understanding myself, which was harder than understanding others.

Still, at the expense of gaining my "people skills," I have lost a sense of identity. I sometimes feel I am standing in the middle of two worlds not really belonging to either one. In a no man's land between the castle and the outside world. I am neither a king nor a peasant anymore. I am a diplomat, a link between different worlds.

La Route Que Je Sais

Je suis une très jeune fille et
Tristesse est la couverture
Qui me chauffes.

Je suis incapable et
Tristesse est la couverture
Qui m'étouffe.

Je suis une belle fleur et
Tristesse est le nuage
Qui me protége.

Je suis une belle fleur et
Tristesse est le nuage que
Je ne peux pas voir à travers.

Je suis un esprit solitaire
La tristesse est ma très belle amie.

Je suis un esprit perdu
Et tristesse est le seul chemin vers ma maison.

Je suis un humaine.
Je peux choisir le bonheur
Mais, je choisis la tristesse
Parce qu'il est le route
Que je sais.

The Road that I Know (translation)

I am a very young girl and
Sadness is the blanket
That warms me.

I am incapable and
Sadness is the blanket
That suffocates me.

I am a beautiful flower and
Sadness is the cloud
That protects me.

I am a beautiful flower and
Sadness is the cloud that
I cannot see past.

I am a lone soul
And sadness is my very best friend.

I am a lone soul
And sadness is my only road home.

I am human
I could chose happiness
But I chose sadness
Because it is
The road that I know.

We Ate Like Goliath

The sky is sugar coated with stars
Pinholes upon blackness
pulling down this heavy cloak,
scavenging the velvet for the sour sting of five points on my tongue.
Tasting the incense secreting from the floor boards
Lit by the mighty nguyen chun mastering her intellectual arts in Beijing.
The sky is poisoned with stars.
It is the flesh that holds the bones from spilling out
onto the dinner table next to the corn.
We ate like Goliath that night
because our feet were too far apart.
Egads! I'm shakin in my boots!
The sarcastic flip of his tongue.
I wanted to cradle him in my arms,
And rock him into independence.
Like a fan we opened our fingernails,
making room for un-welcomed ants.
Courtney anne banana man has lost it all again.
She will choke on patience waiting by the register.
Her shoe dots the outline of a numbing smile.
She must find her spine before knowing which way is up.
Ein kleines stern mit ein weisses bauch.
The air knocks on my ribs
Hoping to find a warm place to stay
As the night shyly fades away from the breeching sun.

Breakthrough Session: Bulimic to Her Therapist

Doc, it's not about thin.
Though that's what everyone gushes: *Girl,*
you don't have nothin to worry about,
as they eye my thighs,
eschew the butter crust and finger
a sensible grape.
You know I don't come clean
with this stuff much, Doc,
but I been thinkin...
this could be my claim to fame,
so to speak!
You ever heard of a gastro-renegade?
Picture it:
Bonnie & Clyde squeal into dusty border towns
sitting high in a low rider caviar black Corvette
(It's a new century, Doc.),
stopping once on highway 10 outside Alvarado
to slug mescal and make love
like two wolves tearing at the dark.
Man, that worm didn't stand a chance.
They shock the locals with lusty gropes
and the lambada.
Bonnie is the real firecracker with a taste for the strap,
a flair for flash, and a bullet
ride to rage--
WHAT did you say?
The bar is CLOSED?!
and wham! Campfire roasted rabbit and bits of agave
everywhere!
Clyde, of course, swoons for his furiously lanky lady,
aches to rub his licorice-colored stubble over her stomach, smooth
as a Smith & Wesson.
Bonnie plants a sour kiss on Clyde's honored lips and they ride off
into a caramel desert, smothered in a sunset orange as Mrs. Daley's
Thanksgiving pumpkin pie.

Yeah, that's as good as me, Doc,
a bonafide Gen-X quick draw. I can

unload a muffin or purge Mom's chops with the flick of
an acrylic-tipped index, outside the subtle narrowing of
Maybelline's envious glance,
return to the clink of Wedgwood, and dive
into the brandy sauce.

You think I'm a victim, Doc?
that maybe I've been dished up a short serving?
left with leftovers, so to speak?
I just know
when I'm hunkered over Lysol swabbed porcelain and dingy tile
in a dinner-hour bathroom ablaze on Colley Avenue,
recoiling from caloric OD,
exhuming a plate of hummis, I smell
the burn of tires and hear the horn of that black Corvette.
It brakes hard and spits gravel. Clyde slides
the tinted window down like a silk slip
and whispers smoky as a single-malt,
She'll be scoping hits all night tonight.
Bonnie winks from behind the wheel
you-go-sister approval for eating
my cake and hating it too,
for blasting shotgun shells in the luncheonette of my heart,
for winning the shootout
in every woman's
skirmish with cellulite.

Painful Harvest

I saw the dark seeds of a man's heart today
They had exploded from his chest
All over the woman he was speaking to.

I don't know what caused such an eruption
Of the inner workings of that terrible organ
But the outpouring showered her with a strange viscera
She had not seen

Or been prepared for
And in that violent, unexpected, love
She was destroyed.

Invisible

Invisible, Have you ever looked
At yourself in the mirror?
And asked, who am I?
Covered in different material.

Under the make-up, and
Different colors of your hair,
Sometimes long or short,
Who knows, who really cares?

The way you speak, at times
Is shady, how you act,
How you walk, day after day,
After day, it's all the same.

So, who are you? I ask
Who is he? Who is she?
You're invisible, invisible person,
Invisible me.

Bodies

Some of us have
Large bodies
And we have
Become weary
Of hiding
In the cobwebby corners
Of life
We want to stride forth and
Reach out to our dreams
And we don't want to drown
Our mornings
In tears anymore
We will not hold our female faces
Under water
And we will not
Scream
Into pillows
Because other women
Have flat sides, and
Smooth thighs

We will open ourselves
Up to the world like poppies
And clothe
Ourselves
In dresses
And bear our toes
Like princesses

We will not
Smother our
Woes in apologies
And we will not
Flinch
When we see our unclothed breasts
In foggy bathroom mirrors

We will not sit

On our hands
And let our futures
Roll under
Our eyes
Murmuring
Those melancholy words:
"Tomorrow, tomorrow..."

We will rise
Up from the lint carpets
And take our lives back
Into our bowling-ball arms
We will knock down the walls
And demand to be noticed

We will stand in the doorways
And fill up our lungs
With the sky
We will sing for what we have
And desire
We will not bend
Until we have what is ours

We will not lie dying
Until we have
LIVED
From the gut of our strength

We will make love
From the depths of our being
And we will make love softly
Like ants stepping
On threads
And tenderly
Like leaves
Caressing
The sidewalk

And we will make love
Because we have love
Inside of ourselves to give
We will
Lift our eyes
To the sun's gaze
Fan out our wings like butterflies
And smile
Quietly
Because
We have remembered
The words
"In his own image"
And because we know
Without a doubt
That
We were born
Beautiful
And we will
Die
Beautiful
We will laugh out loud
And we
Will
Crucify our fears.

Kira Brook

They Cut the Soysauce with Sprite

Back in the zone, between intention and the firm lucidity of my hands, the glasses, scratched and cloudy like pond ice are filled to the first line with tea. I wonder who the hell designed everything I touch, because it's obvious they, the inventors, never used the damn invention. The jug which contains the tea has a handle like a wet knife, and my life line is paining me. The trays are made of plastic so slippery that I'm not a waitress . . . I'm a misguided insignificant, run off to the circus.

The ache of chore heavy arms is nothing, though, compared to the sense that everything, all the words that slap my open ears, is in Korean, and I can't understand a poop. I'm a plasic flower toy that dances when you say anything into my mike. Every Asian restaurant has those plastic flowers, right? Only I'm that all American tacky amusement toy.

Three Korean boys, barely five foot three, wearing matching trench coats of camel hair and looks of pure boredom are smoking through the sides of their mouths. I'm a machine to them . . . only I can't speak their language . . . the instructions are written in English. I'm the height of Asian technology . . . made in Korea . . . used in the States.

"Bladhe blah?" I grin, might as well dance like a monkey. I'm pressing leather menus to my chest because I know there is a slice of cucumber like a pop art pin stuck to my shirt, and I look pathetic enough trying to repeat the foreign chewing.

"I'm sorry, I only speak English." Faces blanch . . . cigarettes are impatiently shed, might as well dance like a monkey—might as well ash on my tongue.

"Rice . . . one more rice." I move. I move as fast as I can, and I feel like the air is somewhere else, because I've been smiling and nodding and trying to play it off that it's every day a Korean girl can't speak her language. That all over this rolling country with its apple pie and red pickups, Korean girls work in Korean restaurants and dance like monkeys where to get the banana "blah" means run to the kitchen and pretend to be busy.

And the zone welcomes me. I feel the hanging cloth brush my head as I duck through the kitchen door, that odd cloth door with its split tail . . . must be some Asian thing, how would I know.

The rice tins are perfect orbs in the heating case, polished geodes in the fire, they crack open to reveal sticky, sweaty opal beads . . . and they burn the insides of my sesame seed fingers. Even after I dunk my tips in the greasy bucket of water at my feet, even as I blow and mutter prayers, the metal burns. I'm in an Aladdin cave of these odd treasures. And I did read that Amy Tan book, and I think I know something about the abundance of oddities in Asian cooking . . . sauces so red even the Americans know it's chili. The deep ocean rippling green of cabbage, and the

metamorphosis bean sprouts, dotted with water chirping as they are chopped into stews. The zone is letting me change hands like I was always ambidextrous. The zone is giving me instructions, keeping me from dropping the ice cubes, and placing the face of that girl, glossy-lipped with the strange pink squid appetizer, and the pile of sweet smelling beef on a wooden platter with the guy in Gucci.

Chopsticks, spoons, raw garlic, gas iron grills . . . like some stereotypical Chinese fable . . . ten thousand jade bowls, and the one girl who needs to do it faster, better and all with the disadvantage of being born deaf to her native tongue. What can I say? I'm a plastic flower toy, popular in the early 90's . . .

Three sound smacks on my shoulder knocking the stews, tofu tossing like ships in a storm . . . my boss . . . Adashe can't tell me, so he hits me to the tables, alien words drop at my feet . . . I'm dancing.

The girl gets the squid . . . she was here the week before, and tipped me three dollars to her 100 dollar meal. I smile, she grunts. A cheap gorilla with lip gloss . . .

The waitress is Korean, right? Gucci doesn't want the beef anymore and I hold it for a second wondering if it was because my thumb was too close to the scallions.

I'm spraying my hands with the lukewarm water. I understand how mud could be a proper substitute for chocolate cake, and I see now why my mother never really ate what she'd slave for me in the kitchen. And I hear outside, the people. They are streaming in and I listen for one friendly word in English, hoping some traveling couple in fleece and sneakers decided to challenge themselves in "Korea house." The cook looks at me and shakes his head. His cigarette is something of a marvel . . . never falling into the food, right?

At moments I'm not crazy, my black hair in pigtails, my yellow skin flushed from beef stock, then they ask me for something and I grow horns.

Deep inside me, my smaller awareness is clearly watching through layers of apologetic soysauce-stained waitress-wear. This Korean girl who has a story that would clear the air, maybe even of its smoke . . . if only someone thought to ask. If they knew how I was plucked by fate and positioned, my back to the East. If they knew that being adopted meant that sometimes your parents were not the same race and taught you their words for "hungry" and "full." Then maybe this smile and dance would look less plastic and more naturally vulnerable.

And that awful bitter root mashes between my teeth—when suddenly I know they all speak both, and I speak one . . . yet they won't stoop to me and I can't jump to them. That root that tastes first like acid then like licorice . . . why the

hell don't they order in English . . . what the hell are they doing in Boston anyway, if they want to be back in Korea so much? But I'm reminded, as the zone greets me with a tray of Coors light and Korean plum wine . . . worlds can meet, and worlds can mesh . . . and though the plastic flower doesn't look as ridiculous if a person would just sing into its mike, singing or talking, it will still dance.

So I guess I'll deal without music.

Deli Haus Night

She has blue eyes
Bluer than blue
So blue that the word blue
Doesn't begin to describe the depths of color held within her eyes

Not the pedestrian blue of raw indigo
But like the subtle blue of a frost-rimmed arctic pool
A chilled shot of Blue Curacao
The taste of orange heat wrapped in a vision of blue

She is my waitress
The only reason to come here really
To this dim and grungy haven
For the insomniac legion of club hoppers
Desperately trying to make some kind of connection
Find someone who might understand them

She navigates this mass of seething,
Obnoxious humanity
This crushing mudslide of black lipstick and Stridex
With the ease of an ocean dweller
Comfortably gliding through shoals of Goths and Eurotrash
A smile for some
A cold blue stare for others
Instant freezer burn

She comes to my table and smiles
A secret little smile (she looks like a young Audrey Hepburn when she smiles)
I'm never sure if she's glad to see me
Or amused at my continued attempts to poison myself
We chat
She takes my order
I never know exactly what to say to her with my friends around
I can never tell her how much I admire her forthright attitude
Her practical femininity

She's a damn fine waitress too

Is it any wonder
After I walk out of the cozy,
Frenzied,
Slightly Germanic atmosphere of the Haus
I can't tell whether the burning sensation in the pit of my stomach
Is caused by the food or by her
Does she hide any feelings for me in the deep currents of her
Too blue eyes?

A Night in Liangshan

At the darkest point in the night,
When imagination has the upper-hand,
Let focus beyond horizon,
And touch nature,
With nothing but a blink,
And wind pushing against a face,
Through a bambooed forest,
Supplying breath,
To slowly bend neck to sky,
And gleam each pinhole
Of white light,
Under its vast black shield.

Make slow an exhale with a bead of sweat,
Whose eyelids hang at half mast,
Asleep,
In total awareness
To a deep sharp universe,

A shock of animal,
To quickly match its signal,
And divert, what is it thinking?

All along heart pounding,
Blood thrusting and lungs drawing.
What music to come from nothing,
And only nothing more seductive,
But a single vibration,
To chorus,
Always singing,
And never alone,
With curdled mud between spread fingers,
Magnetically cold and enticing,
With dirt dancing in its glittering particles,
Reflecting broken facets from star to star,
Pressed against mother,
Who sings,
From her relaxed lips,

And flesh-warmed cheeks,
Rocking back-and-forth,
With each double-beat of her heart,
Sun to sun,
Moon to moon.

At Night I Cover My Ears in Tears

At night I cover my ears in tears
The man downstairs must have had too many beers

Doomed to this kid that you fueled with anger actions
Disgust mostly sick most, never have satisfaction
Till your bones melt high incident clips and crumple zones
Hold a fix on your eternal, intruder interrupted my zone
Dwell the matter I must follow, why you proposed only the lonely know
Swallowed my mother when she was hollow
Who can blame a woman like her, singular parent
One love already dissolved and the solution left polluted
Two kids with a father who broke out as resoluted
So f--- it she needed love and you provided false clout
Stomping on the bottom man and I wish she just walked out
Knew you was jacked as a stepfather, bit my tongue on the issue
Next to stormy weather and forced tolerance but secretly vexed
Wish I would have spoken on it but why deny the bliss
Mom's with a new husband casting needles puncture pressure
Briefly lifted the guilt from a divorce snuffing her pleasure
Now you're all up in the family tree, come broken nuclear
With termites corroded in your veins and elected to drown the pain
But the pain couldn't quite die with a thrown back whiskey sour
Puritan, crushing Moms between rocks for at least an hour

Until the day I die

That's why
At night I cover my ears in tears
The man downstairs must have had too many beers
Now every night of my life he beats his wife
Until the day I die
Timepiece must've read early morning at least
So I lay death's cousin, woken by the sonics of the beast
That somewhere deep beneath me a fracture had seized at my neck
Breath was it, a flag that marked the end of my peace
Conference of the birds I heard my mother dove cry
Not absurd just routine I'd learned
Just keep my grill locked and hope the entropy stops me process

Stepfather's got to fight verbally when his liver's soaked
And products come in bottles stuck with drunken last nerve up too close
But I couldn't sense the distinction from the other nights' live wires
Ceremony's sparked again a dry one in comparison to this one
Handing crutches to my psyche, I was tripping
Huddled up clutching sis I think I heard a dress ripping
I should've reacted to that
But I didn't know the extent, please
You could've caught him in time
Yeah, that thought's occurred to me constantly
Now I've been digging my head and I don't know what he wants from me
Until one of us is dead I suppose

That's why
At night I cover my ears in tears
The man downstairs must have had too many beers
Now every night of my life he beats his wife

Until the day I die

Much more than abrupt I heard the silence erupt
But it was just a touch of tough love that I heard from above
The calm and the climate confused me
The dawn was a floozy
Barely risen but still beckoning to me
The song of the night's events amused me, morbidly
In a petrified state I wait, to Deadwood on duty
Just tempers flared I figured woozily
When all is dead and done a pair is just as happy as they choose to be
Now off to where the wild things dwell for shuteye
The prospect bored me, awakened by the step sounds coming towards me
A quick glance at my mom's darkened silhouette in the hallway assured me
So I sunk with hope that hibernation would cure me
And slept my last sleep while I counted cloned sheep
And dreamt about nothing for the last time ever
The ignorance was blissful just a recollection
Of the gift of innocent times from merciful a deception
Woke to hazy landscapes to find my world defied the laws my mind mandates

Patching jugulars with Band-Aids
The turn on you laid well above my bed
Was here and only barely through the shock of what her broken face told me
You should have known what happened
I was young and oblivious
He almost killed your mom
If I knew I could have done something
You'll never see him again
Yeah but I see him every night
And I cover my ears in tears as he beats his wife

At night I cover my ears in tears
The man downstairs must have had too many beers
Now every night of my life he beats his wife

Words I Will Not Erase

From what I know of your skin,
a sun pours over your bones.
On starless nights the doleful sully
these jeweled hours with sleep.
Above the silent street, one small window spills
ochre into the immense sky, and
night forgets the tenacious dawn.
Once again I will shed dry moorings, push
into liminal echoes, drown
in the hungry black of your hair.
Never mind the questions,
dun cares of the harried.
Lovers' tongues need not explain.
You are written in my ribs,
words I will not erase.

In the morning
when husk-colored light cleaves
my still room, I will not lament
evening's gauzy flame,
nor implore the moon
your shadow.

I can burn through sorrow
from what I know.

Let the Punishment Fit the Crime

The reds! Those blues! I could not stay away from these magnificent markers. Each color was like a Bible and I had to worship them until the day I die.

I tried to pretend that these markers weren't as great as they really were. I even tried to occupy my time doing something else. But, these markers were calling my name from across the room, "Oh, Courtney." I tried to ignore it. "Oh COURTNEY!" It grew louder and louder. I could not rebel. I stepped close to them and saw a piece of paper all set out for me. How ironic. Each step reminded me of my sister, and the way she had strictly said not to touch her markers. I'll only draw one line.

I uncapped a blue marker with a pop, breathed in the fabric tip of the color, and imagined the beautiful paint that would soon appear on my paper. I pushed my body onto my knees, and pressed my elbow into the brown shag carpeting. Lightly, but neatly I set the end of the marker onto the paper, and made myself a simple line. I sat up straight to examine my work. Plain. I looked around the room to assure myself that I was alone. I was. A couple more lines won't hurt. Once again, I put the tip of the marker to the paper . . . but this time a little harder, and scribbled a huge circle. I sat back enjoying every minute I could get out of this, and giggled. Then replaced the marker onto the paper and scribbled. At first I started slow but as each line was drawn, I began to move faster and press harder. My hand was in a frenzy. I could not stop. I pulled a green out of the package and now I was holding two markers with one hand, and working more ferociously than before. I colored so hard that the paper started to shred underneath the wetness of the color, but that didn't stop me.

I breathed harder and harder, adding every color one could imagine to my crinkled paper. I could feel the end of my picture coming, and the excitement rushed through me. My first piece of artwork is almost finished! As soon as that thought had occurred, I saw a red speck come up the stairs out of the corner of my eye. "COURTNEY!" I did not have to look. I knew exactly who it was. The markers fell from my hand and onto the floor. Darkness swallowed deep inside my belly. I gulped and looked up. My sister's face was red. She resembled the beautiful red marker which I had just used. She ran to the aid of the markers. All the tips had been pressed down flat. She searched every marker for at least one survivor of this gruesome battle, but no. All of the markers were dead. "How could you? I told you not to!" I could not reply so she continued.

"You wasted all my markers to draw scribbles! Your picture doesn't look like anything!"

One thousand knives went piercing through my ribs. My drawing was beautiful. How could she not see it? The adrenaline started pumping through my veins. I

squinted my eyes, and stared into my sister's face. I could not feel anything for her right now, other than hate. I moved my tongue around my teeth, puckered my lips, took a deep breath and blew! A big puddle of spit landed right on her forehead. Triumph filled my head. But, with every action there is a reaction, and before I knew it . . . WHAM! A breath of air slipped between my lips as I fell to the floor. The pain throbbed throughout my belly. If this was a tummy ache, this has got to be the worst tummy ache I've ever had. It took me a couple seconds before I realized what happened, SHE PUNCHED ME! My lips started to quiver. My teeth started to chatter. I couldn't hold it in. The tears flowed, as I wailed and moaned as loud as my lungs would let me. My throat started to burn with cold screaming, and my head started to throb. In five seconds flat, my Dad and Mom were at the scene. I looked up at them with droopy puppy eyes. I'm the innocent! My sister explained the story, without even telling them that she punched me. I searched for a voice somewhere in my throat and sucked my lower lip back into my mouth, "but....but....m-m-mom... s-she p-punched m-mee." My Dad looked me sternly in the eye, and then looked at my sister. I knew he was searching for a punishment.

As he thought, I let the salty tears fall down my face and land on my lips. I saw my Dad's eyes suddenly light up. I feared what he was going to say next.

"You girls have been bad. Courtney, for the next twenty minutes you have to spend spitting into the sink. And Kristen, you have to spend those twenty minutes punching a pillow."

Twenty minutes? I looked up to my mom for some help, but she avoided my eyes. I couldn't do anything. I bit on my lower lip, hoping I would start bleeding so my Dad would feel bad for punishing me. But, to no avail, my teeth didn't puncture the surface. I crawled on the floor past my parents until I reached the stairs, from there on, I ran. I ran through the kitchen barefoot, trying not to focus on the cold floors that were numbing my toes, and trying not to notice how bad my stomach was hurting. I stomped each lazy foot up the stairs. Hoping they would hear me. I can picture my Mom running back to me, wrapping her arms around my cold shoulders, and carrying me to my bed. I opened my eyes and looked behind me. Nope. My mother was not there waiting behind me. I looked down and rubbed my feet on top of each other trying to create some kind of warmth. Then, I darted my eyes over to the bathroom sink, gathered a mouthful of saliva and thought to myself, how can I spit for twenty minutes?

My Life Dealing with Friendship and Loss

When the phone rang that early Sunday afternoon in January of 1996, I had no idea a friendship would die.

"HELLO?"

"JENNIFER?" the voice, thin and distant, wheezed from the receiver, unrecognizably.

"Yeah?" I'd never liked telephone conversations, so, for the past six years, since my late mother Sandy's death, I had avoided answering the phone whenever possible. Why hadn't I simply let the answering machine take the message?

"It's Tom."

Tom. I did not say his name aloud. In fact, I stood silently watching the naked branches outside my window whip in the cold January wind.

When I first met him, Tom had been a student in my second grade class at Constable in Kendall Park, New Jersey, but eventually, he moved to Texas, and on to other teachers as he worked to develop a good education. After Sandy's death, however, Tom had gotten in touch again, and over time, we became friends. In 1994, we saw less of each other, as friends sometimes do, but, that summer, after I returned from summer school in Maryland, I realized that our lives had drifted apart. When had I seen him?

"How are you?" Tom broke the silence from the other end of the line. More than a year had passed with only occasional contact, usually by phone.

How was I? I did not know myself. The time between Sandy's death and from the educational institution had been a spiral into screaming grief with no sign of ending. The schooling itself coiled from nightmare walks through the city of Baltimore, to isolation among old friends, to an embarrassing and despairing return home and another year as a student that, for a variety of reasons, most beyond my control, has failed miserably every year. Something has changed within me, which even today, I do not truly understand.

"How are you?" I sighed, changing the subject.

The line went dead for a minute, and then, before I could say anything, Tom spoke again, his voice dark and steady.

"My father died yesterday." The chill in his voice, the ache behind the empty words, froze the room around me. About the time I left for summer school, Tom had begun the arduous task of making peace with his estranged father, who had been diagnosed with cancer, and was, in fact, dying.

The wind stopped outside; at least the branches stopped moving. Words came almost without thought as if someone were speaking through me, as if some moving spiritual entity channeled the words through me, rather than responding myself. When the distant words of comfort ended, something in my chest sagged like an empty sack.

"Do you want the directions to the funeral parlor?" Tom asked.
"No," I said, "I can't come."
Silence thickened at the other end of the phone.
"You can't?" he asked.
"No."

Our friendship died that day. I knew it even as the words streamed from my mouth. Somewhere in time, it had been dying; now, it was dead.

Often since that time, I have wished that things might have been different that day. Death and loss come in life, often without explanation or meaning. The real grief, I only realized later, had nothing to do with failing my old friend that day, or the death of our friendship; however, the real grief is that while the friendship had been vital and alive, things I had meant to say, feelings of both sadness and love I'd meant to share, confessions I had meant to make, praise I'd meant to give, all those words lay like dead leaves, which had the opportunity to fall and now clung impossibly, lashed to the branch outside my window. All of those words, so necessary to say, so easily said, lie regretfully, within me still.

The pain of this failure has stayed with me since, and remains unmitigated by any explanation that would lessen the sense of loss I feel about it.

Perhaps a better ending will come in a life that faces those truths. I see with greater compassion now, that I am very flawed. I do not like my faults very much, but have no excuse for them. Instead, I try earnestly to embrace even the darkest sides of my nature, which means finding the words necessary to heal my own life, before I have even that regret to despair over, and find myself damned by my own death.

Courtney Bartlett

Another Night

I'm here again. At another place I don't really feel like being at. I'm looking through the crowd, seeing the same three people over and over. It's been ten minutes and it's already humid in here, my hair is sticking to my forehead with sweat. I wish I hadn't worn this sweater.

I make myself feel at home in the corner overlooking the stage. I make mental notes of every person that walks by: that boy's hair is really green, he looks like the Jolly Green Giant. And, that buff girl looks like a bull with her septum pierced. I stare at the impatient crowd down below. Everyone is bouncing up and down, or tapping their foot and some even look like windup toys that a thoughtless child had left on the kitchen floor.

I'm not in the mood to enjoy myself. I haven't talked to him all weekend. I wonder what he's doing now. Sometimes the music is loud enough to make my temples throb. It forces me to rest my head upon my knees and push the noises out of my head. Layers of blues and dark purples cross my eyesight, and this is where I hear his voice. In between sleeping and unconsciousness, I look up searching for him. His voice continues in my head, holding an unstable conversation with my imaginary self. The same words are playing over like a scratched record. Now every person around me has his face holding themselves up on wobbly knees. The same stance. How could he let them steal it from him like that?

I need some fresh air. I walk outside, recognizing nothing but the same cold air. I take a seat on the curb next to a really lanky guy eating greasy French fries. I could go for some food right now; not for hunger, just because eating takes up time, and I can't wait to go back home. Just so I feel the comfort of him being in the same area of me.

Every car that drives by I look to see if it's his. Maybe he's taking the long way home and ended up in this foreign town. I'm teasing myself for even believing he'd be here, but still my eyes are racing back and forth between each driver's windows. They are going by so fast they look like a rainbow of blurs. Why are there so many goddamned cars in this town?!?!

I give up searching and walk back into the crowded, breathless room. I find the same dark corner and stand--alone. Nothing but this corner seems inviting. Even if someone were to socialize with me, I'd smile and hope I bleed into the wall. Even with small talk, I feel like I'm betraying someone, somehow. I lean against the pole and slowly slide down, letting my head rest against my knees to block out distant chattering and to shield my eyes from second hand smoke. Layers of blues and dark purples cross my eyesight again, and this is where I hear his voice.

In a World of Confusion

In a world of confusion,
There is you,
Amongst strangers and enemies,
There is you,
A source of truth,
A mind like mine,
A sharing of laughter,
A known relief,
My mind's traveling thoughts,
Feeling I'm in a world all my own,
You prove me wrong,
By then, affirming them in your words,
Like a flower in need of sun to grow,
I need you to brighten my dim world,
With your strong intelligence,
Words of wisdom,
And similar insane humor,
I feel a special bond,
When I laugh alone,
I know, later, I will laugh with you,
I know that amongst my despair,
A small light shines,
Piercing my darkness,
There is you.

Erin O'Flaherty

Loveless and Lost

Loveless and lost,
On a path to nowhere,
Never having been left alone like this,
Every day has a small sense of despair,
Leaving behind memories of a love,
In a world completely alone,
Not believing in love anymore,
Even would've reconsidered if I had only known,
Sensed the worst, but hoped for the best,
Slipped under the carpet and put to rest.

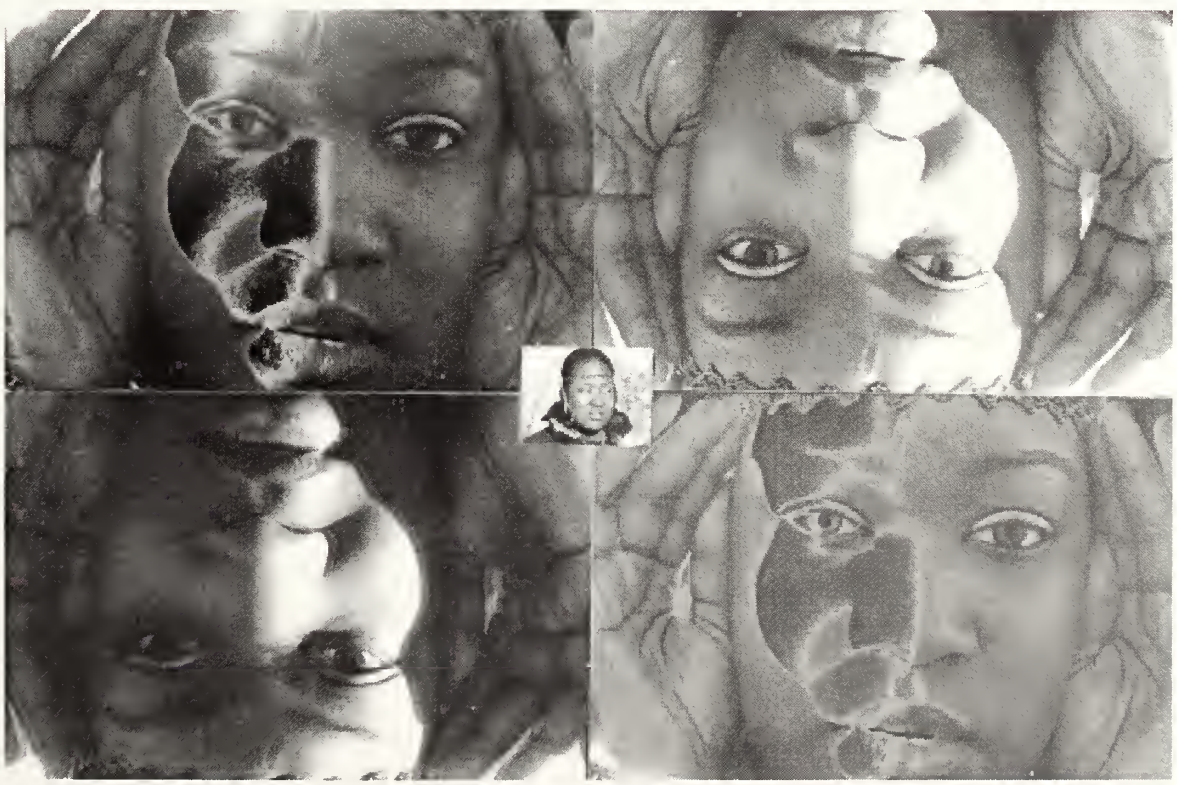
Just One Time

My eyes went straight into his,
Yet my hands were vigorously traveling

My heart was staying in its right place,
Yet my mind fell off its cradle.

The physical pleasure will not erase your thoughts:
What happens when it's over?

Do you fall in love,
Or do you fall apart?



Dear Mother

I've been thinking about you.
Ever since I knew you existed, without me,
and me because of you, I've thought, and tried to laugh you off...
knowing your hair is now gray, or maybe just a few black strands.
Akin, in flesh and bone, bearing the same sex and same hands, to wash our faces.
Maybe I had been too heavy as you fled from . . . something,
or maybe you had lost me and never thought to search,
or losing me had been your object from the first,
because I was another mouth besides your own and,
I no longer gazed from your breast.
And it may seem mean of me to think you ran,
when I could have been torn from your arms,
but mother I have no memory of this. I have no memory of you,
and when I think of mothers, it's always with a stuttering, repeat of facts,
omissions that you gave me life.
And I have felt ticklishly curious when watching a movie,
where mothers talk blood to their daughters,
and mothers cry mild after SIDS,
or grisly old men in the forest raise bear cubs till parallels tassel to frayed ends.
And I have wondered in night light hushed rooms,
if ghost sisters and brothers lay beside me.
You might not have known when you labored, that rejection is a two-sided pain,
as you screamed for my exit and I screamed for return...
but now I no longer know why.
And so I am a daughter to someone who wants me,
thought of my schools and my lunch,
and now I am a daughter two times the wiser,
as if I had already failed at it once.
I've been thinking of you like the warmth of stars
and the darkness of space where time tangles...
and you come up through layers just to duck down again,
in concept and scent . . . and beauty marked wrists that orbit goodbye.
And then like I've wished for a million times eyes closed
on every cell that I've gained without you,
I think that you're dead,
that it took that much to leave me,
because how can you live a lie...
how can you say that you tried?

And everything seems to hang in the air, like a kamikaze bubble-filled sky . . .
and my knowledge of life is a statue faced west
and for every sunset I see not its rise...
for once long ago, you looked in my eyes...
and thought of me not as my mother.

A List of Broken Things

A copper teapot
With a Bakelite whistle
"A collector's item" you said
A Skull—
The small bone thing I never liked
With the snake through one eye
Two green glass bowls—but it wasn't my fault and the soap was slick and the sink was
Metal and enamel
A huge chunk of asbestos
Countless dishes and innumerable windows.

A list of unbroken things:
My heart's dark-iron cage
And the zig-zag lines
That the shadow of your hand makes
When it passes over my night-peace.

Editors' Notes

Jenica Antonellis-I don't consider myself to be a gifted writer. I decided to be a writer because I love words and because I'm completely incompetent at doing anything else. If my decision to write was based upon whether or not I thought I had talent, I would be petrified of even picking up a pen. The only reason that I have the courage to write is that I believe in the amazing transforming power of perseverance. Having a knack for something is only a minor detail in creating success—taking hold of something and sticking with it is the only thing that produces results.

Courtney Anne Bartlett- when i was 7 i gave my neighbor my salamander and he cut it in half with a mousetrap. i was sad. i have been writing for 6 years. As the years went by i progressed more as a writer. i wonder where i'll be in 5 years from now. i like acting, writing, sleeping, photography, dancing in my room and making REALLY ugly faces in the mirror. (seriously . . . they are ugly.)

Aubrey Ramage-Lay was born in Tucson, Arizona And while He has lived in Boston for most of his life He still considers himself a citizen of his own solipsistic paradise Nevertheless He has traveled the world extensively In his quest to become a better writer And a better human being Better than you, anyway

Cesca Waterfield- I started writing because I can't talk. I thought writing would vent the range of emotions that wrack me in the span of a minute. I found that writing intensifies memory and feelings so I avoid it when I can. When I was a kid I heard Nina Simone and started singing and writing songs. I would auction my body parts to Mephistopheles to write songs every day. Improvement has nothing to do with talent and everything to do with desire.